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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000972

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO CG ELECTIONS
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OSCAR KASHALA

REF: KINSHASA 927

Classified By: DCM TDougherty, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary. Presidential candidate (and AmCit oncologist) Oscar Kashala believes he is well positioned for July 30 elections, having forged an alliance with minor political parties that could lead to direct cooperation with Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba and/or UDPS leader Etienne Tshisekedi. Kashala claims he has rebuffed several overtures

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from President Kabila's inner circle, and that "dangerous pressure" is being put on him and his party by the Presidency. He supports "negotiations" as a pre-condition for elections, and said he will soon be launching an international fundraising appeal and expects particularly strong support from individuals and institutions in the U.S. End summary.

¶2. (C) Kashala telephoned the embassy June 15 to request an appointment with the Ambassador, saying he wanted to discuss his "recent meeting with the UN Security Council," to convey general security concerns, and to provide a status report of his presidential campaign. DCM and poloff met with Kashala for thirty minutes the following day. Kashala spoke only about his campaign and security-related issues, making no mention of the Security Council visit. (Note: Kashala did not meet individually with the UNSC delegation in Kinshasa June 10-12, though he did attend a large group meeting on June 12 with several other candidates, diplomats, and the press. End note.) Kashala made no direct reference to last month's arrest of three AmCits working for his campaign, the primary subject of his May 25 and only other meeting with embassy staff (reftel).

Claims of Support....

¶3. (C) Kashala claimed he is now in an alliance of 34 political parties, and that he has been in direct contact with Vice Presidents (and fellow presidential candidates) Bemba and Azarias Ruberwa. Though not part of the new Bemba-led RENACO coalition announced on June 16 (septel), he said Bemba had called to ask that Kashala and his Union for the Reconstruction of the Congo (UREC) party join forces with Bemba's MLC -- an option at which he is "looking carefully." The UREC alliance, according to Kashala, is fielding about 1000 parliamentary candidates.

¶4. (C) Kashala stressed that he has been in close contact with Etienne Tshisekedi's UDPS. He noted in particular that he had been working with the party's "political adviser and lawyer" (presumably Joseph Mukendi) to discuss a political

alliance.

¶ 15. (C) Kashala said he has been contacted six times to meet with President Kabila. He claimed that members of Kabila's security detail, as well as unnamed members of parliament, have been urging him to meet with the president. Kashala said he would not meet with Kabila, "at least not until after the first round" of elections.

... but Concerns About Safety

¶ 16. (C) Kashala claimed that the Presidency is feeling threatened by his campaign, and in turn is threatening his party. He specifically mentioned that National Security Adviser Samba Kaputo and Ambassador-at-Large Augustine Mwanke Katumba were responsible for the "dangerous pressure" being put on his party. He mentioned that concerns about harassment had led him to move his mother (who lives in Kinshasa) and his brother (who he said is "with the police" in Kisangani) to new residences. He noted that he is still looking for a replacement firm to provide campaign security (reftel).

¶ 17. (C) Claiming that those around Kabila were guilty of "intimidation" and "gross violations of human rights," Kashala said the accusations of illegally attempting to buy weapons made against his lawyer, Bonyi Mukadi, were "cooked up" and "ridiculous." Kashala said that Mukadi (a Congolese-Belgian dual national), who was brought in for questioning on June 8 and held for a week without charges being filed, was deported to Belgium the night of June 15. (Note: Mukadi's detention and deportation was badly handled by the GDRC, and we expect the Belgian government to lodge some sort of protest. End note.) Mukadi's assistant, who

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was also summoned by the authorities, is still being detained in Kinshasa, according to Kashala.

"Negotiations" Before Elections

¶ 18. (C) Kashala said that negotiations need to take place to "clarify" key constitutional, social, and other issues. He pointed out that he had met June 15 with Monsignor Laurent Monsengwo, the Archbishop of Kisangani and president of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), and that he supported the "Catholic Church's idea" for negotiations before elections. Kashala averred that the absence of negotiations, coupled with pressure and intimidation from Kabila supporters, are causing many Congolese to question why elections should be held at all. Kashala added, however, that he personally supports elections.

The American Candidate

¶ 19. (C) Kashala (comment: rather disingenuously) said that some European ambassadors had asked him if he planned to change Congo's political and economic orientation to favor the U.S. if he were elected. While noting that ties with European countries would not be broken, he pointedly stressed that closer ties with the U.S. would be a good thing for the Congo.

¶ 10. (C) As those in power are "trying to squeeze" his funding sources, Kashala said he would soon be launching a fund-raising campaign. He intends to use his U.S. website as well as direct solicitation to raise funds. Noting that he had already had a fund-raiser at Milton Academy, Kashala said he will be drawing on established networks at Harvard, Massachusetts General Hospital, and professional associations in the U.S. and abroad to "let them know" of the pressure he was facing and to ask for contributions to his campaign.

Comment

¶11. (C) Kashala had clearly thought in advance of the messages he wanted to convey, and he delivered them carefully. First, he wants others to believe his political star is on the rise. Though the government's handed Kashala a gift of publicity that money couldn't buy as a result of its clumsy handling of the case of the 32 so-called mercenaries working with Kashala, Kashala is still very much playing only in the minors. In a BERCI poll conducted the second week of May, Kashala was the preferred candidate of only 0.3% of the electorate. Whatever bump he received due to recent publicity about the mercenary case is not significant. Second, Kashala wanted us to know he is allied with the UDPS and that he is seeking further alliances, including with some strange bedfellows. Third, he wanted to send a message that the holding of elections could be imperiled if negotiations don't take place -- a message that lacks credibility. It is clear that the large majority of Congolese are tired of endless political class negotiations and want to move to elections as soon as possible, a commitment shared by the DRC's international partners. And finally, Kashala wanted to make it known he has support in the U.S. and intends to play his "American card" whenever he can during the campaign. End comment.

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